

## Should We Have Known Better?

by Jessalyn Estill

Throughout life, we sometimes make decisions we regret. In these instances my well-meaning mother, like many other well-meaning mothers, will sometimes point out that I “should have known better.”

On April 20, an explosion occurred onboard the oil-drilling rig Deepwater Horizon, causing millions of gallons of oil to gush into the Gulf of Mexico. Now, more than two months later, the oil continues to flow, making it the worst environmental disaster in our nation’s history. A recent report estimated that **100,000 barrels of oil** are released per day.

In two short months, our earth’s oceans have been thrust onto an international stage, an unfamiliar platform for an often ignored and undervalued resource. Now the thick crude covering our shores, drowning our wildlife and saturating our politics, has oozed into our collective consciousness. The question is: Should we have known better?

Many Americans blame **BP**. And technically speaking, they should. The spill is a result of an inadequately sealed well on the ocean floor, prompting natural gas to build up and ultimately explode. And the truth is that BP doesn’t have the best track record when it comes to safety. According to a Center for Public Integrity Investigation of Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA), BP has a history of “**flagrant**” **safety violations**. In fact, OSHA fined BP 760 times compared to **ExxonMobil**, which has been fined once.

Pinning the spill on BP is an easy answer. When BP agreed to create a \$20 billion claims fund it seemed like the right thing to do. On the surface, BP is clearly responsible and should be held accountable. But like the oil spill, the answer to “how we got here” runs much deeper.

In a discussion about the spill a friend of mine claimed he would boycott BP. My friend is not alone: A recent survey of **Awakening Consumers** revealed that 38 percent of respondents would never buy from BP again; 31 percent said they would not buy BP fuel “until they clean up the spill.” That means 69 percent of those surveyed are currently not buying from BP. In the same conversation, another friend argued that the solution wasn’t to stop buying from BP, but to stop buying gasoline altogether. Why? Because of our addiction to oil.

The U.S. consumes more than 20 percent of the world’s oil, but we own just 2% of its reserves. But I thought we knew that. I thought we knew about peak oil in 1956, when **Marion King Hubbert**, working in the Shell research lab, predicted that U.S. oil production would peak between 1965 and 1970. I thought we knew there was a problem in 2006, when George Bush announced in his **State of the Union Address** that “the time has come to do something about the United States’ addiction to oil.” And I certainly thought we knew that when the Deepwater Horizon started extracting oil at unprecedented levels in April 2010. The question is not how did we get here but rather, shouldn’t we have known better?

In President Obama’s recent State of the Union Address, he stated that our “national mission” is to move away from a reliance on oil and develop alternative sources of energy. In the same speech, he blamed oil industry lobbyists for blocking progress. It may also be argued that the consumer is to blame for blocking progress. The longer our nation continues to feed the oil addiction, despite years of evidence and “knowing better,” the longer we’ll wait for clean energy technology and solutions..

The BP oil spill is a travesty, but it may also serve as a wake-up call. Years of inaction, not ignorance,

have brought us to this critical point. The spill just may be the catalyst needed for more Awakening Consumers to take action and fundamentally change the way energy is consumed.

With any luck, 20 years from now my children won't ask me, "Shouldn't you have known better?"